**Zephaniah 2:1-7 Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation,
2Before the decree is issued, *Or* the day passes like chaff, Before the Lord’s fierce anger comes upon you, Before the day of the Lord’s anger comes upon you! 3Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, Who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden In the day of the Lord’s anger. 4For Gaza shall be forsaken, And Ashkelon desolate; They shall drive out Ashdod at noonday, And Ekron shall be uprooted. 5Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast, The nation of the Cherethites!
The word of the Lord *is* against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines: “I will destroy you;
So there shall be no inhabitant.” 6The seacoast shall be pastures, With shelters for shepherds and folds for flocks. 7The coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah;
They shall feed *their* flocks there; In the houses of Ashkelon they shall lie down at evening.
For the Lord their God will intervene for them, And return their captives.**

 We’re continuing our look at Zephaniah tonight. In our scripture, we have two very distinct parts: verses 1-3 is calling for repentance of the nation, while verses 4-7 concern the coming judgement. God always gives ample opportunity for a nation to repent before He judges. Time and again through the Bible, repentance is called for and called for. When a nation repents, like in Jonah, God hears. When a nation remains rebellious, God eventually judges. It’s the nation that chooses it’s outcome. God executes judgement based on the choice.

 Recall with me that the prophet set forth in chapter 1 the horrors that were coming. It makes sense that following that very clear outline of the horrors to come that Zephaniah will now issue a new call for repentance… one last chance to change. If the people of Judah had repented, God is merciful and kind. Verse 1 says *Gather yourselves together, yes, gather together, O undesirable nation.* My grandmother used to say, “Collect yourself.” When we were acting out, she’d say – you’ll want to collect yourself young man. In our verse, it means gather yourselves and realize the evil you have done. In order for repentance to take place, an earnest understanding of the sin must be in place. O undesirable nation – the ancient Hebrew carries the idea of a nation that doesn’t desire to change and is no longer longed for. A powerful call to an unrepentant nation to come together and repent.

 Verse 2 says *Before the decree is issued, Or the day passes like chaff, Before the Lord’s fierce anger comes upon you, Before the day of the Lord’s anger comes upon you!* Stay the Lord’s hand while it may still be stayed. Repent before the Lord’s anger comes upon you. So often, people stay in their sin until disaster strikes. Notice the Before is repeated 3 times. Before the decree, before fierce anger, before the anger comes upon you. This makes it clear that the time to repent is before calamity – and it will come as fast as a heavy wind blows chaff and dried grass on the air. The Lord has said He will wipe Judah like a dish, and He can bring calamity quickly. In Luke 21:34-35 we read *“But take heed to yourselves, lest your hearts be weighed down with carousing, drunkenness, and cares of this life, and that Day come on you unexpectedly. For it will come as a snare on all those who dwell on the face of the whole earth.* In Jeremiah 36:3 it says *It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the adversities which I purpose to bring upon them, that everyone may turn from his evil way, that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin.”* This is the true hope of God, spoken through Jeremiah – Maybe My children will hear and I can yet forgive them, before it’s too late. Do you hear the love there?

Verse 3 says *Seek the Lord, all you meek of the earth, Who have upheld His justice. Seek righteousness, seek humility. It may be that you will be hidden In the day of the Lord’s anger.* The prior verses were addressed to the whole of Judah. This verse is targeted to the meek, that have upheld God’s justice. It’s a clear message that, just because the rest of the world is going off the rails and all looks hopeless, the meek and the humble must continue to seek God’s face and follow His commandments. Isaiah 26:20 says *Come, my people, enter your chambers,
And shut your doors behind you; Hide yourself, as it were, for a little moment, Until the indignation is past.* It may be that God will hide the righteous from the coming judgement, or remove them as He did Lot. God will not forget His children, even in the day of calamity.

But now we shift gears with verse 4-6 *For Gaza shall be forsaken, And Ashkelon desolate; They shall drive out Ashdod at noonday, And Ekron shall be uprooted. 5 Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast, The nation of the Cherethites! The word of the Lord is against you, O Canaan, land of the Philistines: “I will destroy you; So there shall be no inhabitant.” 6The seacoast shall be pastures, With shelters for shepherds and folds for flocks.*Here, we see Zephaniah begin to foretell the fate of the surrounding cities and nations. These places border Judah and will be well known to them. It sends a clear message of the progression of the Babylonians toward Judah. When they’re invaded, the clear message is that there will be no place to run. All the neighboring areas will already be in ruins. The historical recounting of the invasion by Nebuchadnezzar shows that he did indeed take many of the cities of the Philistines. *Woe to the inhabitants of the seacoast, The nation of the Cherethites!* The Cherethites are Philistines that live on the coast of the Mediterranean. Ezekiel 25:16 says *therefore thus says the Lord God: “I will stretch out My hand against the Philistines, and I will cut off the Cherethites and destroy the remnant of the seacoast.* The judgement continues - *The seacoast shall be pastures, With shelters for shepherds and folds for flocks.* Let this verse sink in – the seacoast would have been the dwelling place of seagoing vessels, merchants, the wealthy. Now it will be a pasture, with shelters for shepherds and folds for flocks. You recall that last week, we talked about how the wealthy and the princes would be utterly destroyed, all wealth taken. The same will befall the merchants of other nations – their wealth will be taken, they will be carried into captivity. Wealth, gold and silver, mighty navies will not deliver them from the coming Day of the Lord at the hand of the Babylonians.

In verse 7, we get a taste of hope though, even in this declaration of disaster *The coast shall be for the remnant of the house of Judah; They shall feed their flocks there; In the houses of Ashkelon they shall lie down at evening. For the Lord their God will intervene for them. And return their captives***.** God leaves this hope – the seacoasts that have been taken from the Philistines will come into the future possession of the Jewish people after their return from captivity. They will feed their flocks and lie down in peace in the houses of Ashkelon – history tells us that Ashkelon was a Philistine city right up until 604 BC, when the people were exiled by the – wait for it – Babylonians and they never came back to repossess the city. Instead, it came into the hands of the land of Israel around 450 BC. Never again did it grow to the importance it had prior to Babylon invading.

What a wonderful and powerful God we serve. Leave this place tonight with that in your heart. God spoke in 625 BC what would surely happen over the span of 20-40 short years. He spoke of promise to His people. God could be trusted then and He can be trusted now, no matter what is coming at us. He will not forget the meek and the humble. He will remember those who love Him and call upon His name. It was true then… let’s give thanks that it is true even today.